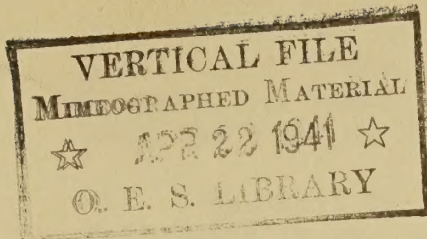


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IN PLACE OF COTTON

By
H. H. Bennett, Chief,
Soil Conservation Service

Big things are scheduled in America's Cotton Belt during the coming weeks. Cotton farmers will be planting their 1941 crop. They'll have an eye on AAA payments for soil conservation practices and reduced cotton acreage. They'll have an eye on the price they may expect for their cotton at the gins next summer. And they'll have an eye on the Department of Agriculture's new supplemental cotton stamp program which offers cotton stamps and cotton goods for cotton acreage.

For sometime now, cotton has been the big question mark in the South. Better than anyone else, perhaps, cotton farmers know the meaning of a cotton surplus. They know what 12 million bales of cotton stored in the warehouses and depots of private and federal agencies can do to the market. Cotton farmers realize that cotton is no longer the king it once was.

But you can't easily quit cotton overnight in a region that has been tuned to cotton production for generations. Cotton is still the cash crop. Cotton brings in the money--some money, at any rate.

Then why not compromise with cotton? The AAA soil conservation payments help make such a compromise possible. The Department's 1941 supplementary cotton stamp plan is a further help.

Under this plan, farmers will receive cotton order stamps for planting less cotton than their 1941 AAA allotment, or their 1940 measured acreage, whichever is lower, at the rate of 10 cents a pound times the normal yield of the underplanted acreage. It is estimated the new program will bring about a reduction of about a million bales, or about 2 million acres, in cotton production this year.

What will be done with the land that would have gone into cotton, if there had been no cotton stamp program? The 2 million acres could stand idle, but that would be waste. It would be worse than waste, for most of the land cotton farmers will take out of cotton will be eroding land--land that will be wasting away bodily or losing its fertility or threatening nearby acres that are still good. The land farmers will take out of cotton will be, for the most part, land in need of protection against erosion. It will be land in need of rebuilding.

That is why the 1941 cotton stamp plan is so timely. In addition to reducing the cotton crop, reducing the surplus of government stocks, providing southern farmers with cotton goods, and providing gainful employment for textile workers, it gives cotton farmers a chance to protect and build up their eroding fields without real loss of revenue.

The Soil Conservation Service is making a detailed survey of the farm lands of the country to find out the physical condition of our farm plant: what lands need erosion control treatment, the degree of treatment needed under various uses, and the capabilities of our lands to produce various crops. In the 10 leading cotton States, more than 20 million acres have been covered by these surveys. They indicate that at least 10 percent of the cultivated land in these 10 States is submarginal today for crop production.

Of the 110 million acres of present cropland in the 10 leading cotton States, fully 10 million should be retired from cultivation. About 10 million acres are relatively safe from erosion, but there are 90 million acres which must from now on be cultivated under a system of farming that will safeguard it from erosion.

Of the total land area of the 10 leading cotton States, 85 million acres have eroded to the point where further use for crops is economically impractical. That's what the physical surveys indicate. And they point out too, that some 35 million acres of land are now essentially ruined, and most of it abandoned--land incapable of crop production even with heavy fertilization and the most favorable weather conditions.

The 35 million acres of ruined land could have been saved, if they had been treated in time. The 85 million acres of severely damaged land may again produce for the benefit of society, if they are treated in time.

A large part of the land in the South has at one time or another been in cotton, or some other soil-depleting crop, but the tendency has always been to put cotton on the best land. Even with the opening of vast new cotton-producing areas in Texas and Oklahoma there is today less land in cotton than at any time in over 40 years. Since 1932, the 10 principal cotton States east of New Mexico have reduced cotton acreage from over 40 million acres to less than 24 million. Most of this reduction has resulted from the AAA program, and much of the land taken out of cotton has been planted to soil-conserving crops.

Even with reduction in acreage, there is still a cotton surplus. But the problem of the Cotton Belt does not end with the surplus. Equally as important as the economic factor of surpluses is the fundamental physical, economic, and social problem of soil depletion left in the wake of cotton production.

For a long time southerners have recognized the need for a balanced agriculture. Several States have adopted "live-at-home" programs. And much has been done to diversify the agriculture of the Cotton Belt.

But there is still a deficiency of dairy products, home garden supplies, fruits, and other foods. Cotton is not entirely to blame for this state of affairs. In the past the chief reason why the Cotton Belt has been unable to produce sufficient milk products has been the lack of home-grown feed and pasturage.

No longer should the problem of supporting livestock bother us. Experience we have had in the erosion control areas and soil conservation districts in the Cotton Belt proves that excellent hay and pasturage can be produced even on some of the severely eroded areas of the region. We have encouraged the use of and have developed methods for planting several soil-holding crops that produce excellent feed, and these are being adopted widely through large parts of the South. Kudzu, which 10 years ago was a little-known plant called "porch vine," today covers an area of over 100,000 acres in the South, mostly in the erosion control areas. Land devoted to the lespedezas and other legumes, hardly known in the South a decade ago, has increased to several million acres.

Those crops not only provide excellent hay and forage, but they are also excellent soil conservers.

Since 1933, the Soil Conservation Service has been working with farmers throughout the Cotton Belt in applying erosion control techniques to the land. In the last 7 years, the Service has conducted 68 erosion control demonstration projects in this region, embracing an area of 3,500,000 acres. In this program over 13,270 farmers have installed complete erosion control plans. The Service is also using in the control program 136 CCC camp areas in the South, where 24,200 farmers have installed measures of soil defense. There are also 807 individual extension demonstration farms covering about 190,000 acres. The Service operates 8 research stations in the Cotton Belt, at which better methods for practical conservation are sought.

Within the last 3 years farmers in the region have organized 208 soil conservation districts embracing an area of 175,000,000 acres.

Since the program began, crop rotations have been worked out by the Service and its cooperators on over 4 million acres of the Cotton Belt. There are some 938,000 acres of land devoted to strip crops--row crops alternating in contour strips with close-growing crops. Over 736,000 acres have been terraced, and some 2,405,000 acres have been put in protective cover crops. Farmers have retired from cultivation some 720,000 acres. All the retired land has been devoted to permanent vegetation which will enrich and build up the soil: 451,000 acres of pasture; 108,000 acres of forest; 156,000 acres of permanent hay; and 3,300 acres of shrubs and vines for wildlife conservation.

Southern farmers have made great strides in the erosion control movement, but withal, the task's just begun. The greater part of the job lies ahead. Millions of acres are still in need of conservation treatment.

The new supplementary cotton program should provide the added incentive and opportunity that thousands of cotton farmers have been waiting for. It not only promises help in the surplus and erosion control programs, but provides a way for cotton farmers to get more cotton goods, more garden products for their own tables, and more food and feed crops on the land.

